

# **MEDIA RELATIONS MANAGEMENT WITHIN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT WITH SPECIFIC REFERENCE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH**

BY

MLAMLI CECIL MAQOKO



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SUPERVISOR: Dr. G. J. Retief  
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## ABSTRACT

This study focused on the representation of the University of the North in the national media during the period 1994-1999. A preliminary survey of newspaper reports indicated that during the post 1994 elections period the University had been getting negative coverage from the national media, especially the *Mail&Guardian*. This period was also characterized by the intensification of transformation processes and other challenges within tertiary institutions.

The aim of the study was to investigate how the national print media portrayed the university during the period 1994-1999 and to find out what role the Media Directorate of the division Development and Public Relations has played in the whole process. Both internal and external factors which had an impact on the representation of the university were also explored. This study is important in the sense that media relations is regarded as a strategic management tool whose purpose is to create mutual understanding between an organization and its internal and external stakeholders - more especially during the period when organisations are facing both internal and external changes. Communication is therefore seen as a central tool which is facilitating the transformation process. Seen against the tendency of the media to concentrate on conflict and events as major news stories - a conflict of interests then emerges.

Content analysis was used to analyse newspaper articles (from the *Mail&Guardian* and Independent Online/Star) covering the university between the period 1994-1999 and interviews were conducted with respondents who had been chosen purposely or specifically because their activities had a direct bearing on the media situation. The major themes or issues which had been the major focus of the media during the said period were then identified and evaluated in terms of the nature of the portrayal of the university .

The study showed that the University of the North had been negatively portrayed in the media and that the absence of a Media Relations Officer, Media Relations Policy and the tendency of the media to focus on conflict as a news value contributed to the negative image of the university.

It is hoped that the study will contribute towards the formulation of a media relations policy at the university, the assessment of the pace of and the whole transformation process and will highlight the major challenges facing public relations departments (and specifically the media sections) of historically black institutions in the current political dispensation.



## OPSOMMING

Die studie ondersoek die mediadekking van die Universiteit van die Noorde in die pers gedurende die tydperk 1994–1999 landwyd. Voorafgaande oorsig oor koerantberigte het aangedui dat ná die 1994 nasionale verkiesings die landwyse pers 'n baie negatiewe beeld van die universiteit geskep het. Die nasionale koerant Mail & Guardian het veral die Universiteit in 'n negatiewe lig geplaas. Gedurende hierdie tydperk het tersiêre instellings 'n verhefweging van transformasie-prosesse, gekoppel met ander uitdagings, ondervind.

Die doelwit was om die beeld te ondersoek wat nasionale koerante van die Universiteit geskep het en die rol wat hierin gespeel is deur die Media Direktoraat, 'n onderafdeling van die Universiteit se Ontwikkelings- en Skakelafdeling. Interne en eksterne faktore wat 'n invloed op hierdie beeld kon hê, is ondersoek. Organisasies se verhouding met die pers is 'n strategiese kwessie. 'n Wederkerige verstandhouding met interne en eksterne belanghebbendes is onder meer belangrik veral wanneer organisasies interne en eksterne verandering ondervind. Die pers se neiging om op konfliksituasies en soortgelyke gebeurtenisse te konsentreer, vereis des te meer goeie kommunikasie.

Die inhoud van koerantberigte oor die Universiteit wat verskyn het in die Mail & Guardian en Independent Online/Star vanaf 1994 tot 1999 is ontleed. Die hoofemas uit die koerantberigte is geïdentifiseer en geëvalueer teen die agtergrond van die beeld wat geskep is van die Universiteit. Daarna is onderhoude uitgevoer met werknemers wie se werk 'n direkte uitwerking het op die perssituasie.

Die navorser het bevind dat die pers 'n slegte beeld van die Universiteit geskep het. Die afwesigheid van 'n persbeleid en 'n skakelbeampte wat spesifiek met die pers onderhandel, gepaard met die pers se neiging om konflik-situasies as nuus te beskou, het daartoe bygedra.

Daar word gehoop dat die studie die bepaling van 'n persbeleid vir die Universiteit van die Noorde sal aanhelp. Verder word gehoop dat die Universiteit se benadering tot die transformasiesproses, asook die pas waarop dit plaasvind, geëvalueer sal word. Laastens word gehoop dat dit die vernaamste uitdagings wat skakelafdelings (veral die pers-afdelings) van historiese swart instellings in die huidige politiek bedeling in die gesig staar, sal beklemtoon.

## DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

Date: March 2001



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project of this nature requires a collective effort and I am most grateful to the following people for their assistance:

- My Supervisor, Dr. G. J. P. ... criticism.

## DEDICATION

- Dr. N.A. Budek and Mr. D.K. Mchaba of the ...

This dissertation is dedicated to my family, for their unwavering support throughout this project.

- Colleagues and Friends in the Library of the University of the ... specifically, Mr. J.K. Tsebe, the University Librarian, for his ... with some of the interviewees. Mrs. Esther Moko ... translating the abstract.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

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#### 1.1 PROBLEM AND RATIONALE

The first democratic elections in South Africa culminated in the formation of a New Government of National Unity. In line with its policy of Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a lot of changes followed - economic, political and social. These changes also affected higher education. The Higher Education Act (101 of 1997) necessitated transformation in various spheres of higher education e.g. admission policies, governing structures etc.

Historically Black Universities (HBUs), who had been at the forefront of the struggle against the inequalities and oppressive nature of Apartheid education, welcomed these changes. Higher expectations by both black staff and students led to dismay because of the low pace of transformation. Transformation means different things to different interest groups within the same institution. This usually manifests itself in the form of resistance to transformation by management and those who live to gain from the status quo on one hand and students and staff on the other hand. This has its communication problems because different messages are often communicated at the same time - which leads to confusion and lack of trust. Consequently battle zones are drawn between the antagonists. Conflict thus becomes the norm and the media thrives on it. As a result negative and sensational stories about Historically Black Institutions fill the front pages and editorials of newspapers. This also affected the University of the North (Turfloop) tremendously.

The Post '94 period saw the University of the North receiving a lot of exposure on national and regional media, mostly negative. The news reports painted a bleak future of HBUs and Turfloop in particular. Despite complaints by the university's Department of Development and Public Relations (DPR) to the media, negative publicity continued. This reflected to a certain extent an ineffective internal and external communication strategy by the Media Directorate of the DPR. Even though there are some avenues for internal communication, external communication seems to be nonexistent. This was also reflected in the report of the Mojapelo Commission which was appointed in 1998 to investigate a wide range of issues at Turfloop. Mojapelo and Sithole, (1998:321) stated that:

"It was however the observation of the commission during its three months of investigation at main campus that there is not much in national media about the University which is generated and directed by the Institution itself."

Another issue that the commission raised was a lack of policy on various issues e.g. human resources, finance and public relations. This had serious implications for media relations and

fund-raising - which are the responsibilities of the DPR. In its report the commission observed that “the lack of policies and procedures has added momentum to the failure of communication in the University”(Mojapelo & Sithole,1998:323). A media relations policy, for instance, would indicate who is responsible for comments to the media about certain issues, what should be communicated and generally how to handle media queries. The lack thereof, results in confusion and uncertainty when a statement has to be made to the media.

The above had a profound effect on the ability of the DPR to maintain mutual relationships with the University’s external stakeholders, including the media. As indicated above, negative publicity affected the image of the University and hampered its fund-raising drive. Consequently the University failed to draw public attention to its services to the community, research achievements, how the institution and its management is doing the best possible with extremely limited resources, research breakthroughs and other positive news (Mojapelo & Sithole,1998).

The media by nature thrives on conflict and sensational news (De Beer & Steyn,1996). “What comes out of the national media about the university is often articles which are either on negative aspects of the Institution or otherwise sensational e.g. high and uncollected student debt, news items about mismanagement of funds by the SRC, questionable remuneration packages, strikes etc.”(Mojapelo & Sithole, 1998:321). It was further observed that “there would appear to be lack of concerted effort to project a positive image of the university in the media”(Mojapelo& Sithole:1998:322). Not unless the division Development and Public Relations take a pro-active approach and create a mutual beneficial relationship with the media, this state of affairs will remain unchanged.

The study is set against this background and the negative image of the University of the North as portrayed in the media will be explored in depth. The Mojapelo Commission had wide terms of reference on which to investigate - communication was but one aspect of those.

## 1.2 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To investigate the representation of the University of the North (UNIN) in the print media during the period (1994 - 1999).
- To investigate internal and external forces that contributed to the image of Unin as portrayed in the media. The role of the division Development and Public Relations( DPR) in this regard will be explored.
- To find ways to improve such an image.
- To assist towards the formulation of a media relations policy. This to a certain extent will help to alleviate the confusion on how to deal with the media/press.



- To help identify issues for further research by scholars, practitioners and researchers in South African Public Relations and Media Relations specifically.

### 1.3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Media relations is regarded as a powerful management tool whose function is not confined to the production of media releases (Chapman, 1989). The main aim of media relations is to create mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics, more especially external publics including the media. This requires a good working relationship between the organisation and the media which is facilitated by a Media Relations officer or Media Specialist. Media relations also improves credibility because an organisation gets free and third party endorsements by the media (Shook, 1999). The relationship between organisational officials and the media is often characterised by fear and misunderstandings (Chapman, 1989). The officials are afraid of being quoted out of context, that reporters will not convey intended meaning and to look foolish in front of camera, to mention but a few (Chapman, 1989). This is also based on the lack of understanding of how the media works more especially in a democratic dispensation, where freedom of the press is pushed to its limits.

What then are media relations? Rensburg (1994:162) defines media relations as a “function of public relations that involves dealing with the communication media in seeking publicity for or responding to media interest in an organisation”. The above definition implies both a proactive and reactive interaction with the media. Public Relations is “the management through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders” (Skinner & VonEssen, 1999:4). Media relations, therefore, as a management tool is closely aligned with the strategic goals of an organisation. The Media Relations Officer/Practitioner is an intermediary who is trained to provide accurate, timely and comprehensive information about an organisation (Rensburg, 1994). This transmission of information has to take place within a conducive climate i.e. where management is committed to open and honest media relations (Ibid.) - one of the major requirements for a healthy and mutually beneficial relationship between the practitioner and the media, (Chapman, 1989).

Media relations, more especially within institutions of higher learning do not operate in a vacuum. It is affected by socio-economic and political factors within and outside the organisation. Pratt as cited by Savio (1992:3) maintains that “socioeconomic and political systems define the structural role of the practitioner, and that makes PR’s role a function of the social system”. In the past, Universities operated in an environment where they had to support the status quo i.e. Apartheid policies - a source of conflict between management and staff/students (mostly black). Therefore changes in the system will have an impact on the practitioner’s performance of his/her duties. Transformation is one of those changes. Media Relations Practitioners have to contend with often conflicting pressures from various interest groups who have different perceptions of the changes within organisations. A case in point is



the current crisis within Historically Black Institutions e.g. University of the North, Fort Hare and the University of the Western Cape. The crisis at these institutions is a product of the demands for transformation and democratisation within them. According to Dlamini, (1995:39) “the reason for a need for transformation or radical change in South Africa is because of the demise of the policy of Apartheid. Because black people were adversely affected by the policy of Apartheid, they would like to see a change that will remove all the vestiges thereof”. Some of the demands in higher education include the call for equal access and participation, more emphasis on student concerns, etc. As a result students had to be accommodated in structures of governance and transformation forums as per requirement of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997.

Historically Black Institutions lacked autonomy, academic freedom and legitimacy and as a result students were ashamed to associate themselves with ‘tribal colleges’ as compared to Historically White Institutions (Dlamini, 1995 & Mphahlele, 1992). This of course had implications for Alumni Affairs and the resultant reluctance to support such institutions financially.

Governing structures in HBUs had also been based on ‘separation and inequality” (Dlamini,1995:4). White Rectors supported the Apartheid policy against which students were fighting. Structures like Senate, Council and Advisory Bodies also reflected the entrenchment of white domination. This had implications for the appointment of staff members (Dlamini, 1995 & Mphahlele 1992). The call for the africanisation of black universities was a response to that.

According to Manamela,(1997:59)“ top echelons of tertiary institutions still reflect the apartheid legacy.” This has been a source of frustration for both students and staff members in HBU’s (Mojapelo & Sithole,1998). University Principals are also faced with several challenges e.g. collective leadership and transformation, relevant curriculum to community needs and complex and multi cultural campuses (Manamela,1997). Add to this the dwindling numbers of students and subsidy cuts by the government.

The notion of transparency which is the buzzword in the government has also been a rallying call in tertiary institutions. According to Manamela (1997) openness and transparency require a new organisational culture.

The period 1994 -1999 at the University of the North has proven that one way or the other the integrity of a Vice-Chancellor or Principal is attached to that of the Institution (Garson,1995 & Amupedi,1997). “ It is an undeniable fact that the reputation and integrity of any institution depends on the conduct of the Principal and Vice-Chancellor both at institutional level and outside, and what the institution’s community believes about how he/she runs his/her office”(Manamela,1997:59).

Transformation should be led from the top and be all inclusive. Manamela(1997:60) maintains



that “it is becoming clear that Principals and Vice-Chancellors who wish to remain visible in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, should initiate the above transformatory forces, change their style of management and adapt to changed and changing demands and challenges inherent in the transformation of institutions of higher education in South Africa”.

The above-mentioned changes have implications for communication with both internal and external stakeholders. Head(1997:4) as quoted by Rensburg and Stroh (1998:53) explains that “Change efforts often fail because the changes are not communicated well, because organisations fail to align change efforts with the strategic goals of the organisation, and because they do not facilitate learning or advanced training”. According to Rensburg and Stroh (Ibid) “well developed organisational change should be a strategically managed process”. The two authors further explored the shortcomings of change management models and studies where communication management was not seen as an important contribution in guiding the complete transformation process in terms of building important relationships with and outside the organisation, thereby actually facilitating successful strategic change management.

Several tools are used by departments of public relations at tertiary institutions to communicate with external stakeholders. These include newsletters (a focus of Savio’s 1992 study at the University of Natal), indirect fund-raising methods (Mojapelo & Sithole, 1998), road shows, exhibitions etc. This study will however focus on media relations as a strategic media tool in a changing environment. Mphahlele’s historical study on student unrest at the University of the North (1992) and the Mojapelo & Sithole Commission Report (1998) will form part of the analysis of both internal and external forces that contributed to the negative image of the university as portrayed in the media. Other sources will also be explored.

In conclusion, media relations management is regarded as a strategic tool whose function is to create mutual understanding with external stakeholders, build credibility through third party endorsements and serve as organisation’s public voice with a conscience (Dugovitch, 19990). The management part of media relations implies control - being in charge of the whole process. It is not only a reactive process (replies to media queries only) but also requires a pro-active approach towards the transmission of important organisational information to the target audience through the relevant(niche) media. The Media Relations Officer/Practitioner serves as an intermediary between the organisation and the media. This requires a trained individual who is capable of creating and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship with the media on an ongoing basis. Internal and external factors have an impact on the whole process, more especially within a changing environment like a University which is faced with a multitude of challenges as a result of the democratisation process. For that reason a pro-active approach to media relations becomes necessary to facilitate the communication of strategic goals of the organisation.

## 1.4 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Throughout the above discussion the centrality of media relations in the strategic goals of an



organisation has been emphasised. The importance of a mutually beneficial relationship between the practitioner and the media and the recognition of internal and external forces impacting on the image of an organisation as portrayed in the media, was also stressed. Based on the above discussion Grunig's public relations theory of strategic management, situational theory of publics and his models of public relations will be employed throughout the discussion of this study. According to Grunig (1990:90) "strategic public relations does not need the media so much as traditional public relations, and the pressures of public relations on the media should decline". The ideal situation according to Grunig (1990:22) is a two way symmetrical model of public relations which "is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics ...and that symmetrical media relations produces reporting that is less discrepant with the views of an organisation". In conclusion, Grunig (1990:24) maintains that "the better public relations becomes, the less public relations practitioners will need the media. If they practice public relations strategically, they will communicate with key publics about problems and relationships long before they become issues that interest the media ... Excellent public relations needs the media less than does poor public relations and as organisations depend less on the media the better their relationship with the media will become".

For an organisation to attain its goals, its relationship with strategic stakeholders must be strengthened. "Communication management helps the organisation to achieve these goals by identifying and building a healthy relationship with the strategic constituencies. The healthier the relationships are, the more likely it will be successful in achieving what it sets out to achieve"(Rensburg & Stroh,1998:57).

This study on the management of relations with the media at the University of the North will be located within this conceptual framework.

## 1.5 HYPOTHESES

The following hypotheses developed from the above conceptual framework are proposed for this study:

### 1. Hypothesis 1

Reactive media relations contributes to a poor image in the press.

### 2. Hypothesis 2

Incidence of conflict as news value contribute to negative press coverage.

### 3. Hypothesis 3

Lack of a media relations policy leads to confusion when dealing with the press.



## 1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS

### 1.6.1 Reactive (adjective)

To react (act in reply) (Longman Dictionary,1978). In a media relations context it is the opposite of pro-active, where the practitioner only responds to media queries instead of actively distributing positive information that will put his/her organisation in a positive light.

### 1.6.2 Image

Image is defined as “someone’s appearance especially good or bad as seen by other people” (Ibid). Corporate image is the “net result of the interaction of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge people have about a company. In other words everything a company does or does not do” ( Skinner & Von Essen,1999:9 )

### 1.6.3 Policy

The “official guideline or a set of guidelines for the intentions, goals and actions of an organisation in accomplishing specified objectives” (Banki,1981: 543) .

### 1.6.4 Conflict (as news value)

Conflict refers to argument, disagreement, quarrel (Longman 1981). As a news value it refers to the emphasis that is placed on conflict oriented themes, e.g. corruption, coups, political unrest and famine by the media. “Our concern is that the media tends to present the more intense negative moments of social conflict” (De Beer & Steyn, 1996:1). Emphasis is usually placed on events and the process (reasons for ongoing conflict) is often ignored.

### 1.6.5 Transformation

The Oxford English Dictionary (1933) defines transformation as “the action of changing in form, shape or appearance”. Referring to transformation in education the National Commission on Higher Education Report (NCHE, 1996:1) said that “the system of higher education must be reshaped to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to a context of new realities and opportunities ... It envisages a new system of higher education characterised by increased participation by all sectors of society; by greater institutional responsiveness to policy imperatives, and by a new set of co-operative relations and partnerships between higher education and the broader society”. This means undoing the damages inflicted by Apartheid education. Transformation is necessitated by the inadequacy of the apartheid education system to meet several socio-economic demands and to withstand

global challenges.

## 1.7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 1.7.1 Sampling Frame

The study concentrated on the media relations activities of the University of the North's department of Development and Public Relations (specifically the Media Directorate) during the period 1994 - 1999. This is the time when the transformation process within tertiary institutions took shape after the election of a Government of National Unity. The media directorate is responsible for handling all media related activities. Only articles covering this period were selected from the Mail & Guardian and Independent Online databases.

### 1.7.2 Data Collection

#### (i) Content analysis

Newspaper reports covering the University of the North during the period 1994 - 1999 were collected and analysed. A preliminary survey of newspaper reports revealed that the Mail and Guardian and Newspapers belonging to the Independent Group, covered the university more than other newspapers. For that reason both online archives of the Mail and Guardian and Independent Online (IOL) were accessed for relevant articles. For the purpose of this study more emphasis will be placed on those articles.

All relevant articles covering the said period were selected. They were then read, examined carefully to determine the main theme.

The articles served as the **unit of analysis**. For analytical purposes the following articles were excluded:

- Letters to the Editors - even though they cover the University of the North, most of them were just responses to articles that had been published.
- Articles written by members of the University of the North Administration e.g. in the Right to Reply column of the Mail and Guardian. These were closely related to the above.
- Articles which cover the university as part of other universities (not separately).

The contents of the articles were analysed and grouped into themes. They were then further evaluated according to three criteria: negative, positive and neutral - depending on the perceived portrayal of the university. The method that was used to analyse the contents of these newspaper articles is called content analysis.

Krippendorff (1980:17) maintains that "presumably the reasons for content analyzing mass communications is rooted in the conviction that the mass media, beyond being merely entertaining, reflect (social-economical)- institutional arrangements in society, are powerful



molders of public opinion or are perhaps causally connected with several social pathologies”.

The advantage with content analysis is that it is:

- Unobtrusive and nonreactive in nature - eliminates the tendency of people to act differently when they know that they are being observed e.g. during interviews and surveys.
- Sensitive to context and symbolic forms - allows one to research situational, semantic and political aspects of messages.
- Combining well with other methods e.g. interviews.
- Cost effective.
- Flexible - can be used for longitudinal (if one wants to study changes over time) and cross-sectional studies.
- Able to cope with large volumes of data. For instance, it would have been possible to analyse all the articles that have been published about the University of the North in the print media ever since it was formed.

## **(ii) Interviews**

To supplement content analysis, in-depth interviews were conducted with the Deputy Director: Development and Public Affairs and the Director: Public Relations and Communications. The above were selected purposely because their actions have a direct bearing on the media - they usually deal with the media on behalf of the institution.

Some of the issues that were covered during the interview schedules are:

- Their perception of the role of Public Relations and the Media Directorate in higher institutions more especially at the University of the North - in a changing environment.
- The image of the university as portrayed in the media and how they thought it could be improved as well as their approach to media relations - active or reactive.
- Challenges facing the university and how the Media Directorate could assist. This is somehow related to the first one. It included both internal and external factors.
- The need to have a media relations policy and what steps were being taken to develop one.

## **(111) Limitations of the study**

The study did not concentrate on all the major national and daily newspapers because of time limits. Claims of being comprehensive enough cannot be made. A preliminary investigation indicated that the Mail and Guardian had covered the University a lot. Independent Newspapers Online also yielded several articles on Turfloop and other tertiary institutions to facilitate a comparative study during the writing process. Journalists, because of time

constraints do not always consult as many sources as possible before they file a story. Therefore their articles sometimes have a certain amount of bias and their sources are often not representative enough. There is also the possibility of missing certain articles in the process either because of the shortcomings of the information retrieval technique or the unavailability of the article itself. Care will be taken to locate as many articles as possible - bearing in mind the limitations mentioned above.

### 1.7.3 Data Coding and Analysis (evaluation)

- Systematic content analysis was used to discover some of the major issues/themes that have been covered in the print media.
- The information was then grouped according to the following options:

E.g. Themes - Corruption, Mal-administration, Chaos, Class Boycotts etc.

Nature of Portrayal - Positive, Neutral or Negative

Results from the interviews - covering the issues mentioned in section 2 above.

Based on the content analysis and interviews - the data was evaluated to see if they support the three hypotheses. This was followed by conclusions drawn from the findings, discussions and recommendations.

## 1.8 OUTLINE OF THE STUDY

### Chapter 1: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the aims and motivations for the study, the research problem, and to introduce the area of study i.e. the portrayal of the University of the North in the press.

### Chapter 2: Brief Background to UNIN

This chapter focuses briefly on the background to the University of the North - its establishment, the context in which it operates and some of the people who have been influential in shaping its current status.

### Chapter 3: Public Relations Theory

Discussion of Relevant Public Relations Theory, more especially Grunig's strategic theory of public relations and the models of public relations practice are the focus of this chapter.



Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Data is presented and analysed.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the study are discussed in-depth, conclusions are drawn and recommendations on possible implementation of the results and areas of further research are suggested.

1.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter a general overview of the study was given. The central issue is the management of the relationship between the media and an institution to the benefit of both, so as to strengthen the ties with strategic publics. Failure to do this results in a situation like the one that has prompted the present study. A combination of issues both internal and external to the institution serve to undermine and dent its corporate image. A strategy that aims to address these issues and create a healthy relationship with the media is the ultimate solution.

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## CHAPTER 2

### BRIEF HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH

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#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Apartheid as a political system invaded every aspect of the existence of black people, including education. It is against this background that the formation of Universities catering for black people should be seen - that their existence was an extension of a political ideology rather than an endeavour to promote the educational aspirations of the black people. Nkondo (1976:2) maintains that "the establishment of ethnic universities should be viewed against the background of the policy of 'separate development' founded as it were on a belief in the implacable difference between man and man consequent upon race".

Before 1960, South Africa had only English and Afrikaans Universities. In 1959 the Extension of Universities Education Act (act 45 of 1959) was passed thus heralding the introduction of university education exclusively for non-whites. Consequently five University Colleges, affiliated to Unisa were formed, vis.: University of the Western Cape - for Coloureds

University of Durban Westville for Indians

University of Zululand - for Zulus

University of Fort Hare - for Xhosas and

University of the North - for Pedis, Southern Sothos, Tswana, Venda and Tsongas.

It should be noted however that before 1960, the University of Fort Hare which was established in 1916 and affiliated to Rhodes, had been open to all Africans (no ethnic distinction).

The formation of these ethnic universities in 1960 was meant to prepare men and women for future participation in the development of their respective ethnic communities and providing leadership within their respective ethnic compartments (Nkondo,1976).

The Act (45 of 1959) solicited mixed reactions throughout the country. English language universities perceived it as an infringement of academic freedom and autonomy. According to Nkondo(1976:4) "they contented that universities should not be subject to the flux of party politics: for the universities continued, whilst governing parties changed. Further, policies change with governments, and the particular ideology of one party cannot be expected to dominate the nature and character of the university for all of time." On the contrary, for Afrikaans language universities, the act was 'a natural expression of a sound socio-political ideology". Blacks perceived the act as a violation of academic freedom and autonomy and contributed to their dehumanisation.

The governing organs of these institutions (ethnic universities ) also reflected a lack of



confidence by the government on the ability of 'non-whites' to manage their own affairs or to co-operate with their white counterparts in their running. The composition of the Governing Councils of the various ethnic colleges were indicated in subsections (6) and (7) of the Act (45 of 1959). Basically, Whites and 'Non-Whites' who were appointed by the Minister formed the bulk of the Advisory council. Commenting on this, Nkondo (1976) lamented that it was ironic that institutions meant for blacks were controlled entirely by whites - until such time that the 'ethnic communities produced experienced and skilled personnel'.

## 2.2 BANTU NORMAL COLLEGE (KOLEGE YA BANA BA AFRIKA)

The Bantu Normal College was established on the 23 March 1946 in Pretoria by the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa to cater for the training of black teachers. It was then transferred to Turfloop, Mankweng Township, Northern Transvaal in 1959.

The transfer of the college to Mankweng, on the outskirts of Pietersburg, led to the suspicion that blacks were to be contained in the reserves away from whites as per Nationalist Party policy at the time and to make it more of a tribal or rural college devoid of any university education (Mphahlele, 1992). This precipitated a series of strikes, sit-ins and boycott of lessons that were to underlie the character of the new campus (University of the North) from 1960 onwards. There were also widespread fears that black universities will not be able to compete with other national and international universities. According to Mphahlele (1992:58) "black students in particular were worried about their status, genuineness and democratisation".

The University of the North was to be led by White Rectors from 1960 during its inception till the mid-70s when the call for africanisation was intensified.

### 2.2.1 Autonomy

In 1969, university colleges were proclaimed autonomous by an Act of parliament but they remained white controlled black universities and remained essentially ethnic institutions (Nkondo, 1976). The University of the North Act (Act 47 of 1969) effectively cut its ties with Unisa. Control, however, became the main issue.

This was the beginning of problems that were to beset these ethnic institutions until today. The SRC of the University of the North (Unin) boycotted the investiture of the Chancellor in 1970 and the paradoxical nature of the university was exposed. According to Nkondo (1976:4) "it was their contention that if the university belonged to blacks it had to bear the stamp of black authority, and further, that if the university was meant to reflect and enhance the black experience, the range of courses that were offered should, wherever possible, contain a large component of the black perspective. In particular, they suggested a reversal of the roles at the level of university government: Council to be manned by blacks, and whites to take their appropriate place on Advisory Council".



## 2.2.2 Black Consciousness

During the same period (1969), black students across the country came together to form the South African Students Organization (SASO) - a black students only affair. The underlying attitude was that one was either 'part of the solution or part of the problem.' To a certain extent, it also reflected a lack of confidence in the ability of the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) to express their grievances and fulfill their aspirations, (Nkondo,1976). NUSAS was predominantly white and liberal. Surprisingly, SASO was welcomed by the governing councils on black campuses. "It is not unlikely that the councils saw in SASO a confirmation of the ideology of separate development, particularly that black students had become disenchanted with the multi-racial National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) as an effective forum to express their grievances and fulfill their aspirations"(Nkondo,1976:5).

Black consciousness also began to make inroads among black staff members at the University of the North. Since the establishment of the university in 1960, black and white staff belonged to the same staff association, but this changed due to the differential treatment that they received at the university. For that reason they decided to go their separate ways and black staff formed the Black Academic Staff Association (BASA) which was officially recognised in 1973.

Against this background of increasing black consciousness, awareness of discriminatory practices country-wide and in black universities specifically, Abraham Tiro, representing graduands, made a speech at the graduation ceremony of the University of the North in 1972. "The speech focused attention once more on the paradoxical nature of the university in which power and authority resided in white hands, the blacks occupying advisory token positions"(Ibid). The immediate response from the authorities was the expulsion of Tiro "for choosing the wrong occasion to give the type of speech he gave and so embarrassed the authorities"(Ibid). In protest, students walked out of the graduation ceremony and a series of unrest at other black campuses followed. Tiro was to be killed subsequently by a bomb in exile in Botswana by suspected members of the South African security establishment.

Subsequently, at an extraordinary meeting of the Council of the University of the North held in Pretoria on 15 May 1972, the Council resolved that a Committee of Inquiry be appointed from its own members, but including members of the (black) Advisory Council to investigate then basic causes of the student unrest at the university. The Committee attributed the causes of the unrest to political factors outside the classroom and that the students had to be groomed for careers within their respective homelands. Among the findings of the committee a special mention was made on the impact of and the need to encourage black consciousness and SASO - a factor which seemed contradictory, to say the least. "To emphasise, on the one hand, that the black student must be taught to accept the homelands, which are based on ethnicity, and to recommend, on the other hand, the promotion of black consciousness because of its pervasive influence and its tremendous potential for good is to suggest, albeit unwittingly, an



underlying paradox and to expose the dilemma of a black university in South Africa” (Nkondo,1976:7).

### 2.3 PRO-FRELIMO RALLIES

On 25 September, 1974 Frelimo became the provisional government in Mozambique prior to the attainment of independence, after a protracted and bloody struggle against colonial domination. This was perceived to be a triumph of black aspirations by students at the university. On the same day students organised what came to be known as Pro-Frelimo rallies on black universities. Inevitably, this caused conflict between students and authorities at the University of the North and elsewhere in the country which led to the banning of all the rallies. Students at the University of the North asserted their right to hold such a rally thus leading to conflict. As a result police were called thus fueling the already volatile atmosphere on campus.

On 1 November 1974, the State President appointed a one-man Judicial Commission of Inquiry (the Snyman Commission which was named after Mr Justice J.H. Snyman, the only member) to :

1. Inquire into and report on :-

- (1) the events of 25 September 1974 on the campus of the University of the North with the view to determining the causes that gave rise thereto and the part played therein by the University Management, the students Representative Council and any other organization of either students or the lecturers, with specific attention to -
  - (a) the relationship on campus between the black and white academic staff and students; and
  - (b) related matters concerning the present and future management of the university, including possible interference therein by the Black Academic Staff Association(BASA);
- (2) to make recommendations in the view of the findings, which the commission deems necessary.

BASA was to be investigated because it had accused the police of generating the violence on the day of the rally in the national press. The major recommendations of the Snyman Commission were as follows:

The commission visualised a university controlled by a council with a majority of blacks, designated by the Homeland Governments concerned, while the teaching and administrative functions would be the joint responsibility of the whites and the blacks; that existing legislation be amended in order that, as in the case of the universities for whites, the University would clearly be seen to be an autonomous institution; that because the majority of students rejected ethnic grouping as seen by whites, a sense of pride in the university could be instilled to some extent if the students no longer felt



compelled to attend a certain university and at least had a choice of universities; and that differential treatment of black and white staff in respect of remuneration and conditions of service be eliminated forthwith(Nkondo,1976:9 -10).

Black consciousness was attributed to the general anti-white feeling among students and that the events around the Pro-Frelimo rallies were a reflection of deep seated differences which were a product of discrimination in the wider society. The university was rejected because it was seen as a product of separate development. There was a feeling that "a black student did not reject his language or traditions but he did not see himself as part of a separate nation but as belonging to a 'family' in a wider context" (Nkondo,1976:9). It became obvious after the investigations that black take over of black institutions could not be delayed any longer. It was agreed that Professor W.M.Kgware would become the first Black Principal of the University of the North in mid-1976. "The findings of the commission that the problems at the University of the North cannot be isolated from the general discrimination and humiliation suffered by black people outside the university is in the opinion of the Black Academic Staff Association a profound truth which can only be ignored by our country at its own peril"(Wolfeson as quoted by Nkondo, 1976:10).

## 2.4 AFRICANISATION

From its inception the University of the North came under white administration but this changed from 1976. Africanisation took over. "This new phenomenon of involving blacks in management in particular, was to be known as Africanisation... It was orchestrated by the philosophy of black consciousness and got hold of the minds and hearts of many black lecturers and students. White domination was to come to an end"(Mpahlele,1992:121). White Rectors and Registers were to be replaced by blacks because of their knowledge of the aspirations and frustrations of black students. Whites were perceived as part of the problem.

There was also a perception that because of 'colour' black people would be prejudiced against when it came to employment opportunities. SASO was at the forefront of the africanisation move. Africanisation had positive results because ultimately a Black Rector was appointed - to be followed by Vice-Rectors, Registrar, Assistant Registrar, Librarian and ultimately Black Deans (Mpahlele,1992).

### 2.4.1 APPOINTMENT OF FIRST BLACK RECTOR

On 22 February 1977 Prof. W.M.Kgware succeeded Prof. L. Boshoff as the first black Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the University of the North. Several factors on campus favoured him. He was the first black professor at the University of the North, the first Superintendent of the men's hostels, first Chairman of BASA and he was the most acceptable candidate to whites,(Ibid). In addition, the general student unrest of 1976, pressure from BASA at Unin, the Snyman Commission report which recommended the appointment of a black administrator and the need to avert more student unrest all contributed to the appointment of Prof.W.M.Kgware (Ibid).



Naturally, expectations were very high following the Prof. W.M. Kgware's appointment - by "both government and parents. They both thought that his mere "blackness" would make him acceptable and therefore more successful in averting strikes and boycotts. They were unfortunately all wrong. In fact the position became worse" (Mphahlele, 1992:123).

Prof. Kgware was never accepted by black staff members. The feeling was that he was more "white" than black and that he was just a token Rector - without any decision making powers. There is a perception that during his tenure he appointed more whites and reversed the africanisation process at the university. White control of all the governing structures on campus was still intact.

During his tenure, which followed closely the 1976 student uprising, the number of boycotts and closures at the university increased (Mphahlele, 1992). The demand for the SRC, which had been dormant for a while, and subsequent class boycotts led to the closure of the university in 1977 and the expulsion of an interim SRC. During class boycotts, students would receive a memo ordering them to go to class or vacate campus - the failure of which would result in the arrival of the police. Students were therefore compelled to leave.

At this stage, BASA submitted a memo to university administration requesting the removal of the Academic Registrar, Prof. J.C. Steenekam, who was perceived to be the real power behind the throne of Prof. Kgware and a racist (Mphahlele, 1992). The banning of both students and staff organisations also characterised this period. The end of his (Prof. Kgware) tenure in 1980 was welcomed by blacks on campus.

#### 2.4.2 APPOINTMENT OF PROF. P.C. MOKGOKONG (1981 - 90)

This period (1981 -90) witnessed many changes at the University of the North despite the increase in government repression and student resistance. The following are but some of the most notable events:

- Intervention of government to curb strikes and boycotts.
- Expulsion of pregnant students in 1982.
- Class boycotts and university closure following the tri-cameral elections of 1984.
- Occupation of the university by S.A. Defence Force (SADF) in 1986.
- Harsh treatment of students by SA Police, SADF and the use of Security Police informers.
- Academic terrorism - deliberate failure of students by lecturers.
- Inactivity of the SRC between 1986 -1988 (period of SADF occupation)
- Protest against white elections in 1989.

The university, however, never failed to write final year exams despite the odds (Mphahlele, 1992). The most noble of all events was the appointment of Prof. P.C. Mokgokong as the second Black Rector after the untimely death of Prof. Kgware in 1980. His



major challenge was to forge ahead with the africanisation of many key posts. Failing which he would have had to “depend on two white Registrars and the white middle level administrative personnel who would obviously isolate him from his fellow black staff members and the students as had been the case during the previous administration”(Mphahlele, 1992:145).

During this period Rectors of Black Universities were admitted as members of the Committee of University Principals (in 1986). This was meant to promote co-operation, comradeship among universities countrywide, parity and equality(ibid.).

Prof. Mokgokong advanced africanisation at the university. To his credit he appointed several black members of staff into key positions e.g. Mr John Tsebe as the University Librarian; Mr.K Msimeki as Director of the Student Counseling Bureau; and Mr.J. Malatji as Deputy Registrar and later Registrar: Academic Affairs. Some academics with two Masters degrees were made professors. This improved morale tremendously and there was a feeling that it would “alleviate frustrations and defuse tensions and thereby reduce unrest” (Mphahlele,1992:177).

According to Mphahlele (Ibid) “the action somewhat changed the image of the university and made it more relevant and acceptable to the communities it was purported to serve”. Despite Prof. Mokgokong’s progress in africanisation and affirmative action he failed to implement staff development to such an extent that all those who were promoted as professors with only Masters, not even a single one of them had a Doctoral degree by 1992 (ibid).

When Prof.Manganyi took over from Prof.Mokgokong in 1991, he demanded higher qualifications for academic staff members e.g. Masters Degree for Lecturers, PhD (Doctorate) for Senior Lecturers and PhD (Doctorate) as well as evidence of scholarship for Professors.

#### 2.4.3 PROF.N.C.MANGANYI’S REIGN (1990 - 1993)

The release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 led to more excitement and high expectations and it worsened the already volatile situation on campus. This period also saw increased co-operation and solidarity between staff and students e.g. Nehawu strike in October 1990 and demand for the release of six students and lecturers held under the state of emergency at Mankweng Police Station.

Prof. Mokgokong led the university for 10 years up till 1990 when he finally resigned after being requested by the council to extend his reign for another 2 years in 1988. He left a hot seat which during his tenure had been characterised by boycotts, strikes and military occupation.

After his resignation (Prof. Mokgokong), there was a feeling throughout campus that the appointment of a new Rector had to be postponed till such time that the University of the



North Act (47 of 1969 ) had been repealed to reflect the interests of the majority stakeholders i.e. black students, staff and lecturers. A memo was submitted to Council in this regard. The governing structures were still reflective of the apartheid system.

Nevertheless, Prof. Noel Chabani Manganyi was appointed in August 1990 as the Principal with effect from January 1991. He took the reigns at a time when political changes were taking place in the country e.g. the release of Mandela and other political prisoners, unbanning of organisations, multi talks etc. - freedom was in the air. Political developments also had an impact on students partly because student grievances were intertwined with community aspirations.

The 1990s also saw the “transformation of the university from a closed system towards an open system - a triumph against authoritarianism, isolation, closed structures and various anachronistic characteristics of the paradigm which prevailed on campus and in the broader community”(White,1997:158). The following are some of the changes that took place during this period :

- A new democratic Council - but still closed and lacks accountability
- Appointment of Mandela as Chancellor
- The Broad Transformation Forum - spearheaded transformation
- More involvement with the community around - this was also encapsulated in the new mission and vision statements

#### 2.4.4 FROM 1994 -1999

In 1993 Professor Njabulo Ndebele took over from Professor Manganyi as the new Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of the North. His main task as stated also in his inaugural speech was to forge ahead with transformation of not only the governing structures but also of the curriculum. His tenure coincided with the establishment of the new Government of National Unity in 1994 and inevitably expectations were very high. His struggle credentials also counted in his favour. Expectations and reality are of course two different things. The pace of transformation became too slow for both staff and students.

It is also during this period that new forms of struggle were popularised. Besides strikes and class boycotts, sit-ins and hostage taking became the order of the day. The media were quick to report on and sensationalise these incidents - which often included a co-operative venture among the students of the three campuses : Main campus in Pietersburg, the Giyani and Qwaqwa campuses.

The image of the university was tarnished even more. The response of management was either to abscond or use delaying tactics like the formation of committees and use of court interdicts to silence both students and staff. This era also saw a significant increase in cases that were brought to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) because of the total disregard for the new Labour Relations Act (Act 66 of 1995) that University



Management showed. The University lost most of these cases, some of which went to the Labour Court.

Most of the stakeholders on campus had been calling for a Commission of Inquiry to investigate several issues, since the 90s. It was only in 1998 after Professor Ndebele had left Campus that the commission was finally appointed, although the idea had also been raised even during his tenure.

## 2.5 MOJAPELO COMMISSION

On the 17 July 1998 the Council of the University of the North, under the management of the then Acting Vice -Chancellor, decided to appoint a commission of Enquiry. This was a culmination of a long process which was spearheaded by the Student Representative Council (SRC), by workers represented by the National Education Health and Allied Workers Union (NEHAWU), Broad Transformation Committee (BTC) and various structures on campus.

The appointment of the commission coincided with the presence of the Heath Special Investigative Unit, which had also been approached. It was inevitable that the two should work together - with the commission forming a basis for an in-depth investigation by the Heath Unit.

Mr Phineas Mojapelo, a practising attorney and member of the Judicial Commission and of the South African Law Commission together with Mr Jerry Sithole, a practising chartered accountant and a member of the National Financial and Fiscal Commission were appointed as Commissions with effect from 21<sup>st</sup> September 1998. The commission had wide terms of reference which included investigations and recommendations on management and expenditure of finances by various divisions; management styles on campus; irregularities relating to funding, management and ownership of Edupark; causes of labour problems; state of safety and security; catering of students; creation and filling of posts at management level; human relations between staff and students, students and management both inside and outside the classroom environment; violation of human rights in the classroom and on campus; freedom of speech and to investigate irregularities relating to the communication system at the university.

The latter, communication system is the focus of this study but will be discussed in depth in later chapters. The terms of reference of the commission reflected a general and deep seated malaise on campus. The final report was handed to management towards the end of 1998 and only became available to the public in 1999. The report received negative media publicity more especially the issues of Edupark and Professor Ndebele's involvement in it. A newspaper article appeared in the Mail and Guardian of July 1999 criticising Professor Ndebele and he responded the following week with his own version of the story.

Generally, the report was critical of Ndebele's administration and the apparent lack of



communication on campus. The failure of the Division Public affairs and Development to communicate a positive picture of the university to the media was highly stressed as a contributing factor to the general image of the whole university. Both internal and external communication were virtually non existent.

On the 1 April 1999 the new Vice - Chancellor, Dr. Biki Minyuku, started his duties. He had more support than some of the candidates that he competed with but by December 1999 he was on suspension facing various charges ranging from corruption to mismanagement. Prof.N.C.Golele of the Department of Tsonga was appointed as the Acting Vice-Chancellor till the end of June 2000 while Dr. Minyuku's case is still under investigation.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

The establishment of ethnic universities was an extension of a political ideology which sought to subjugate the aspirations of the black people in South Africa in line with the policy of separate development. These universities were more of political than educational products and this inevitably led to conflict between those who were pro and those against apartheid education. The perception was that the kind of education that was offered at these institutions was inferior. The impact of ideological decisions became more pronounced on the bad image that has characterised the institutions up till today. Commenting on the University of the North, Mphahlele (1992:299) remarked that "political considerations of this kind distorted the academic, social and political evolution of this university, resulting in its inability to recruit well-qualified staff members to man its academic and administrative programmes. This coupled with student and staff resistance to apartheid higher education system and consequent repressive responses from the government of the day, tarnished the image of the university both locally and internationally".

The impact of black consciousness can also not be underestimated. It was central to the idea of africanisation of ethnic institutions and the University of the North in particular. White control of black institutions became a bone of contention which saw the intensification of the africanisation process. The only downside to africanisation is that it "concentrated mainly on organisational issues but failed to adequately address didactic issues"(White:1997:157). At the University of the North the process was not tied to staff development - which saw people getting senior positions but not doing enough to improve their qualifications. As from 1976, however, black Rectors ruled the university but that did not curb the spate of strikes and class boycotts, partly because there was a feeling that even though some blacks were in charge, whites were still in control. The apartheid regime also served to fuel the conflict through its repressive security system.

The 1990s saw a lot of changes in the country which had an impact on tertiary institutions in the country. These included the release of political prisoners and the call for transformation and democratisation of organs of government including the higher education system. The

formation of the Broad Transformation Council and transformation of institutions like the Council and Senate are products of this period. These changes were also entrenched in the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997).

The speed by which transformation is taking place at tertiary institutions is reflected in the number of strikes that take place every year. Students complain of the low pace of transformation and the lack of resources in black institutions.

Transformation is of course a process and the University of the North just like other black tertiary institutions is facing the need to speed up transformation from both within and as required by legislation. The process is encountering problems as evidenced by the current absence of the Vice-Chancellor and other members of Management who are on suspension on various issues including alleged corruption and mismanagement.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### PUBLIC RELATIONS THEORY and PRACTICE

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#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The relationship between journalists and public relations (PR) practitioners is fraught with conflict and misunderstanding. This can partly be attributed to the tendency of PR practitioners to do everything possible to gain media exposure for their client organisation.

This relationship is characterised by over-reliance on manipulative methods when dealing with the media. The ideal situation is, however, to develop an interactive relationship with the media that is mutually beneficial to both the client organisation and the media. In the long term this relationship should change and minimise the effect of public relations on the media (Grunig, 1990).

This chapter will focus on the work of James Gruning and his colleagues, because of the following factors:

- They have done a lot of research on how public relations practitioners can develop a better working relationship with the media and the societies of which they are part.
- They developed a set of four models of how public relations is practiced and why it is practiced in that way.
- The work they have done to determine the characteristics of excellent public relations programmes and what such programmes contribute to the effectiveness of organisations.

Besides the development of a theory of public relations and practice and its implications for relationship with the media, Grunig has put more emphasis on the strategic management of public relations.

The current study's focus is more on the strategic management of the media. According to Grunig (1990:18):

Theories of organizational effectiveness show that public relations will increase the success of organizations if it is practiced strategically. An organization that practices public relations strategically develops programs to communicate with the publics, both external and internal, that provide the greatest threats to and opportunities for the organization.

The importance of the environment in which public relations is practiced cannot be over-emphasised. The environment refers to economic, political, cultural and social influences that have a positive or negative impact on public relations practice.

### 3.2 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

In public relations practice, publics are the central factor for whom most programmes are aimed. Publics determine the success or failure of an organisation in its attempt to reach its goals. The organisation strives by all means to control both internal and external factors that have an influence towards the achievement of its goals. The ideal situation is to achieve autonomy and mobilise publics that support one's goals, hence the need for better communication. "Having the autonomy to pursue goals is important to organizations because they are more effective if they are able to choose goals that are appropriate for their environmental and cultural context and then achieve these goals" (Grunig, 1990:19).

Since autonomy cannot be absolutely achieved, organisations strive to manage their interdependence with strategic publics by building stable, long-term relationships with key publics. According to Grunig (1990:19) "organisations plan public relations programs strategically, therefore, when they identify, the publics that are most likely to limit or enhance their autonomy and design communication programs that build relationships with strategic publics". This implies selectivity and more focus on target publics who are instrumental in the achievement of organisational goals.

### 3.3 SITUATIONAL THEORY OF PUBLICS

Common practice which is fast fading into oblivion, was for the practitioners to strive for exposure in the mass media for their client organisation. This led to increased competition as a result of jostling for better space in the mass media for a mass audience thus resulting in the adverse relationship between practitioners and journalists.

A slightly different situation emerges when a strategic approach has been adopted. Through research the publics are segmented and then specialised media, other specialised channels or interpersonal communication, are selected to communicate with strategic publics. This results in less jostling for space in the mass media and less influence in the media (Grunig, 1990).

Grunig developed a situational theory that classifies public by how they respond to specific situations or issues e.g. nuclear power, energy shortages, pollution, marketing of infant formula and AIDS. More specifically, the theory explains the conditions under which publics will be active or passive in communicating and affecting the autonomy of organisations. In situational theory, three independent variables are used to distinguish active from passive publics :

- Problem recognition
- Level of involvement
- Constraint recognition

Active publics :



- Recognise an issue as a problem
- Believe it involves them personally
- Believe that they are unconstrained enough to do something about it.

Active publics are more of a threat to organisational autonomy and they define what issues are important for organisations (Grunig,1990). Their power lies in their ability to organise into pressure groups around certain issues. Passive (apathetic) publics on the other hand may seek information from various sources without necessarily paying attention to it. This group makes the most of the mass audience.

Situational theory of publics cautions against the use of mass media to communicate with active publics. For, among the mass audience, certain segments of active publics may be found and messages aimed at unsegmented publics may reach this active group, with disastrous effects. Practitioners concentrate on those publics who have a direct impact on the organisation - the best channel of which is niche, not mass media. The conclusion that can be reached thus is according to Grunig (1990:20) that "strategic public relations does not need the media so much as traditional public relations, and the pressures of public relations on the media should decline".

### 3.4. MODELS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

The above discussion has been more of a normative theory of public relations. A normative theory is described as a theory which was used to solve problems as compared to positive theory which is used to understand problems (Holtzhausen,1995). Quoting J.Grunig and L.Grunig (1992:291 -292) Holzhausen (1995:138) maintains that:

a normative theory did not need to prove that an activity took place according to the way the theory described it. They said: "Theorists construct a normative theory to provide a model that if followed, would improve the practice of the activity that it models. If that normative theory...could not be implemented then it would not be a good theory." Therefore, the conclusion could be drawn that although a normative theory was not expected to explain phenomena exactly, it described the ideal situation, and the extent to which it could be implemented served as a criterion to measure its success.

The discussion in this section will focus on the models of public relations. The idea is to show how public relations departments function and to explain why some chose certain models to practice public relations.

Underpinning the models are two distinctive presuppositions vis. Asymmetrical and Symmetrical

- Asymmetrical worldview - is based on the assumptions that organisations and

opposing groups use public relations to manipulate publics for the benefit of their client organisations and not for the benefit of other group or of both. This leads to a zero-sum game where only one organisation or group or public gains and the other loses.

- Symmetrical - public relations is regarded as a nonzero-sum game in which competing groups or organisations can both gain if they play the game right.

Therefore, public relations is perceived as a “tool by which organisations and competing groups in a pluralistic system interact to manage conflict for the benefit of all” (Grunig,1990:21). The ideal situation is to have a symmetrical public relations department which leads to more organisational effectiveness because it puts more emphasis on conflict management and the benefit of everyone.

Symmetrical public relations also encourages a better working relationship with the media. More emphasis is placed on interaction and co-operation with the media instead of a manipulative approach. This minimises conflict between journalists and public relations practitioners.

Four models of public relations fall within the scope of symmetrical and asymmetrical presuppositions.

- Press Agency - When a public relations programme strives for favourable publicity in the mass media. This is usually achieved through propaganda and it leads to conflict with the media. This is a one way model “in which truth is not essential and the communication content is intended to persuade simply by its prominence or repetition or wide appeal”(Mcquail & Windhall,1993:194).
- Public information - uses journalist contacts within the media to disseminate relatively objective information and controlled media like newsletters, brochures and direct mail. Both press agency and public information are regarded as one way communication models and are asymmetrical in approach. Although it is also manipulative, the public information model leads to a more harmonious relationship with the media. In this model only favourable information is disseminated.
- Two-Way Asymmetrical - uses research to tailor messages that will persuade strategic publics to respond as required. This model is also based on manipulation because only the most persuasive information is distributed. This often leads to conflict when journalists want to report other information



contrary to the one that is fed to them. To communicate more efficiently feedback and feedforward are essential. Feedforward is the information the sender has about the audience before communication (Mcquail & Windhal, 1993). The source of information dominates in this model.

- Two-way Symmetrical model - is based on research and uses communication for conflict management and improving mutual understanding with strategic publics. This is regarded as an excellent model of public relations and is more suitable for media relations because it disseminates information that is congruent with the strategic direction of an organisation. It favours genuine exchange of information and dialogue.

It must be noted however that public relations departments often use different models for various reasons and situations - they are not bound by one model.

### 3.5 EXCELLENT PUBLIC RELATIONS DEPARTMENTS

Grunig (1990) identified three levels on which public relations takes place. At the micro level it is concerned with planning, execution and evaluation of public relations programmes. At meso level, it pertains to the organisation and management of public relations departments. At macro level it concerns environmental influences that impact on public relations e.g. internal (organisational) decision-making processes and power relations as well as social/cultural and political issues, external to an organisation.

#### 3.5.1 Excellent public relations at micro level

The discussion above showed that the two way symmetrical model of public relations and programmes that are based on strategic management are the most effective ones in public relations practice. At micro level, the first steps of public relations are the concept of publics and the segmentation techniques used to determine those publics. Grunig used his situation theory to segment publics and he regarded it as the best mechanism for the job which also formed the basis for a theory of strategic management.

Strategic management, according to Grunig only took place at the micro level of public relations and that it was one of 17 characteristics of excellent public relations departments. It was through strategic management that public relations contributed to the effectiveness of the organisation.

Through strategic management organisations strived to “relate their missions to their environments, to identify opportunities and threats in their environments and to develop and implement strategies to deal with those opportunities and threats” (Holtzhausen, 1995:131). She further argued that the “role of public relations in strategic management was therefore to practise strategic communication management by building relationships with those publics

that could impact on the mission of the organisation” (Ibid).

According to Holtzhautzen (1995:132 - 133), after segmentation of publics according to the situational theory, the public relations practitioner should take the following steps:

- (1) Set objectives
- (2) Plan the communication programme and campaign
- (3) Implement the communication programme
- (4) Evaluate the programme through scientific research

At micro level the concept of issues management also merged. Grunig (1990) described issues management as the use of research to scan the environment and to evaluate programmes. He further maintained that the theory of strategic communication management at micro level was a normative theory of how public relations should be practised.

### **3.5.2 Excellent public relations at meso level**

The meso level is concerned with organisational or managerial level of public relations. Quite a number of factors determined the use of excellent public relations at meso level. Below some of the factors are discussed:

- Public relations roles - PR departments should have both communications managers to conceptualize and direct PR programmes and communication technicians who provide technical services such as writing, editing, photography, media contact, or production of publications.
- Equal treatment of men and women - there has to be opportunities for women also to move to senior management positions rather than be relegated to technical positions only. That way everyone's potential is realised.
- Academic preparation and excellence - advanced and continuous training in the latest theory of and developments in public relations is necessary.
- Organisation of the public relations function - excellent public relations departments are those that :



- Are located within the organisational structure so that they have ready access to senior managers.
- Integrate all PR functions into a single department rather than subordinate them under other departments. Only in an integrated department is it possible for public relations to be managed strategically.
- Develop dynamic horizontal structures within the PR department, making it possible to reassign resources to new programmes as new strategic publics arise and other pass.
- Do not occur by accidents - they adjust to complex dynamic environments only by practicing strategic , symmetrical public relations.

### 3.5.3 Excellent public relations at macro level

At macro level, excellent public relations is determined by two factors i.e. its contribution to organisational effectiveness and the organisational conditions necessary for excellent public relations (Grunig, 1990).

- Participative decision making - involvement by all employees in decision-making and symmetrical internal communication have a positive contribution.
- External environment - a complex turbulent environment with high uncertainty, which threatens organisational autonomy, stimulates excellent public relations to a much larger extent than low uncertainty and low constraints.
- Societal culture - societal culture has an effect on organisational culture, more especially participative cultures as compared to authoritarian cultures.
- Power relations - powerful individuals have more impact on organisations because of the power they wield. If public relations lack the power it will not be as effective as it would like to be. Power determines the success of public relations programmes.

When a PR department shows commitment to excellent public relations, its head is likely to be included in the dominant coalition where he/she stands a chance of influencing how public relations is practice. The opposite, however, results in the choice of PR programmes by powerful individuals who have no understanding of public relations - which often leads to conflict as discussed above. Reflecting on this, Grunig (1990:24) says that “dominant coalitions without a public relations executive from an excellent department

generally choose a nonstrategic, asymmetrical model of public relations that maximizes the potential for such conflict.”

- Research - critical researchers investigated issues like poor ethics of public relations, social and political consequences and the role of women in society and organisations.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

The publics are the main reason why public relations practitioners embark on public relations programmes. This has often led to over reliance on the mass media and subsequent conflict between public relations practitioners and journalists - partly because public relations practitioners have a tendency to manipulate the media in the quest for exposure for their client organisation.

This situation is of course undesirable because no one benefits. An ideal situation is the use of the media to create mutual understanding between the organisation and its publics as well as to manage conflict through communication. This can only be achieved when organisations choose a model of public relations practice that is strategic and symmetrical.

For public relations to contribute to organisational effectiveness it has to be aligned with the strategic goals of and be represented in the highest echelons of an organisation. Public relations should also be able to adapt to changing environmental needs.

The practice of symmetrical public relations creates a good working environment for both practitioners and journalists and leads to less conflict. In the long term it leads to less reliance on the media and to a mutually rewarding relationship between an organisation and its publics.

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## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter data from the Mail&Guardian and Independent Online archives as well as the interview schedules are presented and analysed.

#### 4.2 DATA PRESENTATION

Year	Archive/Paper	Topic	Caption/Headline	Context
1995	M&G 3/02	Suspension	Poke in the eye for Optometry department	Suspension of Deputy Dean Siphso Ndelela after refusing to mark 1994 3 <sup>rd</sup> & final year exam papers.
	M&G 15/09	Boycotts	Ndebele under attack at tense Turfloop	University closed amid student strife
	M&G 01/12	Broadcasting	Students expand their turf with Radio	Radio Turf serves the needs of the community.

1996	M&G 15/03	Academic Progress	Academic excellence in the Bush	Students are tired of politics, they want degrees.
	M&G 19/04	Recruitment	The man to lead Wits into a new Era	Ndebele tipped as the most likely contender for Wits Vice - Chancellor post.
	IOL/Star	Recruitment	Ndebele has vision of new Wits order	Ndebele addresses Wits students and staff on transformation before interview with selection panel.



1997	IOL/Star	Unpaid fees	University owed millions as students refuse to pay fees	University of the North owed more than R54-m in outstanding fees following student refusal to pay tuition fees.
	M&G 21/02	Transformation (lack of)	Ndebele at Centre of Turfloop row	Protesting students accuse Ndebele of being slow to implement change on campus.
	M&G 24/02 (Electronic)	Transformation (lack of)	Fallen hero Njabulo and Turfloop row	Same forces who proclaimed Ndebele champion of transformation have turned against him.
	IOL/Star 16/05	Suspension	SRC members suspended	7 SRC members at UNIN have been suspended after protests on campus.
	M&G 06/06	Class boycotts	Back to class, but conflict simmers	Students return to class after 3 weeks boycott but conflict over transformation remains and further conflict looms.
	M&G 9/06 (Electronic)	Transformation (lack of)	Cauldron Campus of the North	Conflicting views over transformation

1998	IOL/Star	Class Disruptions	Varsity students disrupt classes	Students disrupt classes, demanding dismissal of staff members they accuse of racist conduct.
	IOL 29/05	Corruption	Student council turns Turfloop turmoil	Cabal of students are running Turfloop as a private business, extorting money from outside firms operating on campus.
	M&G 05/06	Corruption	SRC blows R1, 3m on cars, catering	Independent probe found SRC had spent more than R1,3m on cars, catering and clothes.
	M&G 12/06	Corruption/Chaos	Student victory at Turfloop	Students and staff stage a coup, baring academic and management from any role in the appointment of a new Rector.
	M&G 17/06 (Electronic)	Chaos	Students grab a slice of power	Volatile situation at Turfloop requires state intervention.
	M&G 19/06	Chaos	Ndebele calls for intervention	Ndebele calls for government to intervene in troubled campus.



1999	IOL/Star	Ndebele/ Turfloop	The legacy Ndebele left behind	Star Journalist denies personal vendetta against Ndebele and Turfloop.
	IOL/Star	Corruption/ Financial mismanagement	Turfloop Prof. Might face probe	Former VC, Njabulo Ndebele could be subpoenaed before the Heath Investigating Unit to explain allegations of misappropriation by management and then failure to account for assets at Turfloop.
	IOL/Star	Salary/ Financial Mismanagement	R1-m University job for TRC man	Minyuku will receive a salary package of R1-m when he starts as VC at debt- ridden University of the North.
	M&G 19/03	Corruption	Varsity Rector in bid to keep TRC post	Minyuku in bid to keep both his TRC post as CEO and the R1-m salary job as rector of University of the North( Where he starts on 1/04/200)
	M&G 15/04	Corruption/ Mismanagement	Damning report on Turfloop university	Poor management / planning cost UNIN millions in legal bungles.

Year	Archive/Paper	Topic	Caption/Headline	Context
1999	IOL/Star 12/08 (Web date)	Corruption	Heath to probe Vice - Chancellor's salary	Judge Heath to investigate Minyuku's R1,4 m a year salary.
	IOL/Star 17/10 (Web date)	Court Case	Former TRC Head in court battle over job	Minyuku still embroiled in a court battle over his old job at the university despite the fact that he is its current Rector.
	IOL/Star 10/11 (web date)	Autocratic management/ conflict	Team to look into conflict at University	Panel to investigate causes of conflict at Turfloop after academics complained of Minyuku's autocratic style of management.
	IOL/Star 17/11	Mal- administration	Team to investigate Varsity 'Dictator'	Blade Nzimande is investigating allegations of "mal administration" against Dr Biki Minyuku, Turfloop Rector.
	IOL/Star 6/12	Suspension	Minyuku suspended after irregularities	Minyuku suspended after allegations of irregularities and breakdown in communication and trust between him and staff.



Fig 4.2 Explanation of terms

1. M&G - Stands for Mail and Guardian
2. Electronic - the electronic version of Mail and Guardian, which provides more in depth coverage of issues than its print counterpart.
3. IOL/Star - Independent Online archive, where the original article appeared in the print version of Star Newspaper.
4. Web Date - indicates the date on which the articles were published in the archives. This may not be the same as the print version.

#### 4.3 DATA ANALYSIS

A qualitative data analysis was deemed suitable for this type of research. The aim was to simplify issues and facilitate understanding of the problem. Since the key objective of the research was to highlight the representation of the university, data analysis was approached with the following issues in mind:

5. To establish the nature of the portrayal
6. To investigate the major themes that were covered in the articles - these would also serve to indicate the kind of news angles that the media were interested in.
7. To assess the nature of the conflict at the university of the North.

#### 4.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study has the following limitations

- Incompleteness. Although care was taken to collect as many articles as possible, the researcher cannot claim to have accessed all the relevant articles from the Online Archives. This could be attributed to several issues, including the search strategy used, the indexing of the articles by the newspaper companies, and the availability of the articles themselves within the archives.

- The method used (content analysis) has the weakness of not showing a causal relationship between variables.
- Coding difficulty. As the articles are written in words and not numbers, it is not easy to quantify them. Depending on words also has the disadvantage of being impersonal, where the author is physically removed from his final product. One therefore does not have the advantage of examining the true intentions of the author other than to make informed deductions.

#### 4.5 RESEARCH FINDINGS

Below are the research findings based on both the data collection methods discussed above. Results from the content analysis will be examined first - based on what it was intended to examine and then the results of the interviews. Later on attempts will be made to collate the two.

##### 4.5.1 Number of articles

Year	Mail & Guardian	IOL\ (Independent)	Total
1994	0	0	0
1995	3	0	3
1996	2	1	3
1997	4	2	6
1998	4	2	6
1999	2	8	10
Total	15	13	28

In 1999 there were more articles covering the university and most of them were from the Independent Online archives. Trailing closely behind 1999, an equal number of articles was found for 1998 and 1997. No articles could be found for the year 1994 in both online archives.



#### 4.5.2 Major Themes

Topic	Mail and Guardian	IOL (Independent)	Total
Suspension	1	2	3
Boycotts/Class Disruptions	2	1	3
Unpaid Fees	0	1	1
Transformation (Lack of)	3	0	3
Corruption/ Financial Misman./ Maladministration/ Chaos	6	6	12
Other	3	3	6
Total	15	13	28

NB: 'Other' refers to the stories which deal with recruitment, court case, broadcasting, academic progress and Ndebele/Turfloop which could not be combined with the rest of the articles. The focus of most of these articles was on issues like suspension(10.7%), Boycotts (10.7%), lack of transformation (10.7%) and corruption/mal- administration/chaos (42.8%). Suspension of staff members has been one of the problems facing the university and has resulted in several court cases, most of which were ruled in favour of the staff. Since 1995 the number of suspended staff has been estimated at 18 and has cost the university more than the R3.3m budgeted for professional services in one particular year (Nhlapo, 2000).

Unpaid student fees amounted to approximately R161m as of October 2000, (Pretoria News,23 October 2000) . While only a single issue of the articles deal with unpaid fees, the problem has been covered quite extensively by both M&G and IOL but as part of the culture of nonpayment at Historically Black Institutions - which have been excluded from this analysis. Three such articles serve to illustrate this point vis. "Cash crisis for tertiary bodies", IOL, 1998); "Dropouts owe the bulk of unpaid fees", IOL 1998); "Student fees crisis grows as debt doubles to R780m in one year", IOL 1999).

#### 4.5.3 Evaluation of Articles

Nature	Themes	Total
Positive	Academic Progress Broadcasting (Radio Turf)	2
Neutral	Recruitment (2) Court Case (1) Ndebele /Turf (1)	4
Negative	Corruption Financial Mismanagement Maladministration Chaos Lack of Transformation Class Disruptions/ Boycotts Outstanding Fees Suspensions	22
Total (N)		28

It is quite evident from figure 4.5.3. that the majority of articles (78.5%) had themes which offered a negative picture of the university. Only 2 (7.1%) articles had a positive tone while 4 (14.2) were neutral in approach. The negative articles painted a picture of continuous conflict between students and staff/management, staff and management, corruption and total chaos where top management had lost any semblance of proper administration(or rule of law). Commenting on this in his report to the Minister of Education about the university of the North, Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo, concluded that “corruption thus flourishes under weak management. Weak management is also costly. In the absence of systems of command, accountability and discipline the great temptation is to pass the buck on to various ‘investigations’ ... ‘to dig up the dirt’. This is a clear case of investigations taking over terrain that should ordinarily be occupied by orthodox management systems of supervision and discipline”.

#### 4.5.4 Interviews

Responses to the interview questions will be grouped into three categories: duties, image and policy. Questions will be stated first and responses will follow.



#### 4.5.4.1 Duties

- **Who is responsible for media relations in this department?**

It became clear during the interview that no single person was responsible for media relations at the University of the North's department of Development and Public Affairs. Even though a position had been advertised for a Media Relations Officer, the department could not attract suitable candidates. Therefore dealings with the media became divided among the three top managers of the Department i.e. Executive Director, Deputy Director and Director of Public Relations and Communications. These three formed the Media Directorate of the department. The Vice-Chancellor and Registrar (on academic affairs) also handled media queries and interviews.

#### 4.5.4.2 Image

- **How do you think the University of the North has been portrayed in the press during the period 1994 -1999?**

Both respondents concurred that the University had been negatively portrayed in the media during the said period. This was attributed to among other things the tendency of staff and students of being disorderly (strikes and class boycotts), document leaks and the approach of the media (tendency to concentrate on conflict at the university or controversial issues). To illustrate the latter issue, Andy Duffy, Mail & Guardian journalist, responding to a letter of complaint by a staff member of the University of the North on the continued demonisation of the university by the newspaper, said that:

Our interest in Turfloop is not limited to Ndebele. Other elements of interest include: its crippling student debt; the annual uproar on campus when management try to get students to repay that debt; the collapse of student enrolment at Turfloop; whether the university is going to survive the year; the number of academics that students claim have made racist remarks or have racist backgrounds; and that the university's council or, more precisely, those who bother to attend its meetings - has chosen to ignore all this, and instead launches a commission of inquiry into what's left of Ndebele's administration (M&G, 26 June 1998).

One of the problems that were identified at this stage was the failure of the Department to be proactive when dealing with the media (always reacted to published stories, thus losing momentum). A case in point was the publication of the Report drafted by the Independent Assessor, Professor Thandabantu Nhlapo, who had been appointed by the Minister of Education to conduct an "Investigation into the affairs of the University of the North". He began his work on 31 July 2000 and finished at the end of August. The report appeared in the Pretoria News of 17 October 2000 (under the headline "University of the North faces closure") before staff and students on campus became aware of its existence. The Department

of Public Relations were also not aware of its existence (report) which had been gazetted the previous day (16/10/2000).

- **In your opinion which newspapers have been covering the university the most? How can you describe your relationship with most of them? Were they co-operative?**

The following newspapers covered the university extensively during the said period:

- Sowetan
- Saturday & (Daily) Star
- Mail and Guardian
- Northern Review
- Beeld
- Sunday Times

One of the respondents described the relationship with the media as healthy but compromised by the actions of both the journalists and the staff members of the university. The greatest threat to media relations which also affected the university is the leaking of confidential information to the press by internal staff who have ulterior motives. On the side of the media the problem was its tendency (sometimes) not to confirm or check the veracity of the information with the university before publication or give the university enough time to respond - citing deadlines. The media also had a tendency not to publish responses of the university to the allegations that appeared in news reports or positive stories that the university issued. In a letter written to the Mail and Guardian (29 August 1997), the former Vice-Chancellor of the University of the North, Prof. Njabulo Ndebele complained that "Earlier this year, the M&G published an article about an imagined 'crisis' on my campus ... I wrote a response, assuring my senate that the M&G would publish it. My response never saw the light of day. When I called to find out why it was not published, I was given vague, unconvincing answers ... I have revealed the unknown story of my dealings with the M&G over its coverage not only of the problems of my campus, but of higher education in general, because I feel I was actively censored by the M&G".

- **What are the challenges facing the University of the North and how do you think your department can help to meet those challenges?**

Several issues were stated as challenges facing the university:

- Recruitment of students and fund-raising
- Student debt
- Transformation (reconfiguration of faculties and modularisation/curriculum change)
- Poor work ethic among staff



- Internal management blunders (disregard for current labour legislation, thus leading to unnecessary costs e.g. suspension of staff which usually results in court cases and loss to the university)
- Image building

There was a feeling that student recruitment and fund-raising depended on a positive image of the university. The image of the university in turn depended on the activities of both staff, management and students. Then the job of the department would be much easier, rather than to try and portray a false image. After discussing the issue extensively it was felt that there was a mutual relationship between attempts by the department at image building and positive actions by both staff/ management and students.

#### 4.5.4.3 Policy

- **Does the University of the North have a Media Relations Policy? If no, what steps are being taken to develop one? What do you think the policy should contain? How does the presence or absence of such a policy assist/ hamper your job performance?**

The university does not have a media relations policy. This year (2000) they hired Bairds Communication Consultant, a Johannesburg based company to look into among other things the restructuring of the Department of Development and Public Affairs, development of a Communication Policy and Strategy (will include a media relations policy), Evaluate existing communication channels within the university and engage University stakeholders on the development of a communication policy that would be generally acceptable and binding to all (Mohuba, Interview on 19/10/2000).

From the discussions it became clear that absence of a media policy resulted in the lack of control on the statements/messages that were uttered to the media and for those who dared to utter such statements without authorisation, no disciplinary action could be taken. It emerged that during a crisis for instance whoever is approached can make statements to the media, which can be attributed to "informed sources" within the university. The researcher was also informed of a department which sent information brochures to the media without informing the Department of Development and Public Affairs thus leading to embarrassment when the media subsequently made enquiries.

The fact that only one person, the Executive Director, was allowed to sit in important meetings on campus resulted in a situation where the other two had to keep on asking the media to wait for a response while they enquired from him or other Administrators. In communication, there is always the possibility of information distortion as it passes through several layers in the process or is quoted out of context by someone who does not have the whole picture.

## 4.6 CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to look into the portrayal of the University of the North by the Mail and Guardian and IOL during the period 1994 - 1999. Both interviews and content analysis of relevant newspaper articles for the above-mentioned period were chosen as research methods. A total of 28 articles were analysed for this study.

From the combination of the two research methods it became evident that the media concentrated on controversial issues in their coverage of the university and that a negative picture was painted of a university that did less of teaching but concentrated on in - fights, financial mismanagement, corruption and class disruptions. Chaos and mal-administration were the norm during the said period. Only two positive stories about the university could be found, the rest about (78.5%) focused on the negative. This has in certain circles, including the Mail and Guardian, prompted reports of the imminent collapse of the University of the North and most Historically Black Institutions (HBIs).

It also became clear that both internal and external factors contributed to the malaise mentioned above. Internally, the unruly behaviour of staff and students and management inefficiency as well as the reactive nature of media relations at the university contributed tremendously to the state of affairs. The absence of a media relations policy led to less control on the messages that reach the media.

Externally, the decrease of government subsidies to universities, uncertainty over the future of HBIs given current policy on the restructuring of tertiary institutions and the hostile nature of the media towards HBI's were cited as contributing factors.

A more detailed discussion of the findings and some of the issues raised above will be offered in the following chapter.

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## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the findings of the study were presented and analysed. In this chapter the focus will be on the conclusions derived from these findings, in - depth discussion and recommendations concerning their possible implementation and implications for further research are presented.

#### 5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The three hypotheses of the study concentrated on the negative portrayal of the university of the North by the Mail& Guardian and Independent Online Newspapers, i.e. reactive media relations contribute to a poor image in the press; Incidence of conflict as a news value contributes to negative press coverage; lack of a media relations policy leads to confusion when dealing with the media. From the content analysis of the newspaper articles and interviews, the following conclusions were drawn:

- (i) The University of the North was negatively portrayed in the press during the period 1994-1999.

The majority of the articles analysed (78.5 %) gave a negative picture of the University of the North. They painted a picture of corruption, chaos, mal-administration and financial mismanagement. Several factors contributed to this - both internal and external forces were at play (they will be covered extensively in the following sections). The major damage was done to the image of the university as a whole. Overton-De Klerk (1994:194) defines corporate image as "the net result of interaction of all experiences, impressions, beliefs, feelings and knowledge people have about a company". This implies everything an organisation does or does not do. In short, a corporate image is the sum of all the perceptions and impressions that identify a specific company - good or bad.

A good corporate image facilitates the choice of the company's goods and services, sells a company, improves its finances and standing among competitors. A negative image produces the opposite. The same with the image of the University of the North - it affects student recruitment, donor interest and the "perceived quality of its graduates".

Two major factors determine a successful corporate image:

- **Co-ordination of all communication activities** - the various communication activities of a company should complement and support one another. Speeches, advertising,

pamphlets, newsletters etc. should be geared towards the achievement of a single goal. This is tantamount to the concept of speaking with one voice.

- Centralised Image Management - all the above-mentioned activities should be controlled at a central point e.g. by Public Relations or Media Relations Office. This theme will be explored further when we discuss the Media Relations Policy below.

Abiding by these two factors is likely to produce positive results for the company. Control over messages that go to and from the company is ensured and a situation where two or more conflicting messages (as is the norm at the university) are sent is minimised.

The environment in which the office that deals with image building exist, is also important. For an institution to go out there and portray an image of respectability while everything is not good on the ground, is counterproductive. Illusion does not work in image building. In an environment where conflict is the norm, it is not wise to spin things around - that should be left for propagandists or spin doctors.

To sum up, therefore, one could say that not unless the problems facing an organisation like the University of the North are addressed by the relevant structures, instead of being allowed to simmer, its negative image in the press will remain unchanged. No amount of propaganda work will change the situation.

(ii) A reactive approach to media relations contributes to negative representation.

Despite the accusations that some newspapers were biased against the university, one of the factors that contributed to its negative image was the tendency to react to newspaper stories rather than embarking on an aggressive drive to place positive, newsworthy stories in the press. Reactive media relations means that the university tries to respond to articles that appear in the press (to set the record straight) or sometimes to maintain a "no comment" or defensive stance when approached by the media. For instance, some staff members would leak confidential and sometimes embarrassing documents to the press. In the absence of a quick and factual response from the university, the media under pressures from deadline and competition would publish whatever they had. The results thereof, would be negative stories like the ones that form bulk of this study. Momentum is thus lost.

A pro-active approach to the media, on the contrary, serves to highlight positive developments within the institution and counter the actions of dissident movements whose aim is to destroy its image. Moreover, such an approach would facilitate a two-way communication channel between an organisation and its publics and therefore a realisation that the institution has their interests at heart.



(iii) The tendency to concentrate on conflict as a news value has a negative impact on corporate image.

There are conflicting definitions of what news is but there seems to be an agreement that news must be new, must have commercial and conversational value. This lack of consensus on definition prompted Nel,(1998:35) to say “news, therefore, whatever else it may be, is in the eyes of the beholder: reporters, editors, and readers”. Values are however the foundation on which news is built. The following factors are central in the definition of news: audience (readership profile); consequence (effect on reader); proximity (closer the action to the audience, the more interesting); peculiarity (unusual or unexpected); prominence (famous personalities); topicality (interesting topic at specific time); package (variety in tone and topic); visual appeal (strong pictures, more especially for TV news), conflict and time. Our discussion will focus on conflict.

Conflict “is the struggle between two forces” (Nel,1998:21). Conflict could be about values or interests. Several stories emanating from the University of the North bear testimony to this - the conflict between students and staff, staff and management, students and academics because of perceived racism or deliberate failure, conflict among management and within Council. The list is endless. Tomaselli et al.(1987:31) said that “things are newsworthy because they represent the changefulness, the unpredictability and the conflictual nature of the world”.

Journalists are an important component of the news production process because they select and publish stories based on their conception of newsworthiness. Newsworthiness is a product of news values which are socially constructed. These news values determine the kind of reality that is presented to the public as news. Commenting on this, Oosthuizen (1996:77) said, “However, what people tend to forget is that the news media are telling their version of the news about events that they have selected as newsworthy. These stories are also told and presented in a particular way which in turn affects the manner in which media users perceive the world”. Explaining this practice further, Tomaselli et al.(1987:24) said that “certain kinds of reality are singled out, selected from the continually on-going process of social experience, highlighted and made more important than the mundane social processes within which they repose. The event is then re-presented and sold as news to a consumer public. News in this way becomes a commodity”. Therefore the final product, which is called news, goes through a filtering process - bureaucratic and cultural screens which define news-worthiness. News detection, gathering and definition is a product of this process.

(iv) Absence of a media relations policy causes confusion and leads to less control on messages that reach the media.

In his 1996 Annual Address, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the North, Professor Njabulo Ndebele indicated that “the department of Development and Public affairs has been with the responsibility of developing an effective communication strategy for the University.

In this regard, they have to develop, among other things, a code of conduct for the university community to relate with the media and the outside world. This is to address the current practice where anyone who feels compelled to make statements to the media about the university that can potentially have devastating consequences for our university”(White:1987: F10).

That four years later (2000) such a code of conduct was non-existent, leaves much to be desired. As alluded to during the address, there is no control on the issuing of statements and for that matter who is responsible for doing that. At the university, it emerged during the interviews that there is no Media Relations Officer and handling of media queries is presently shared among the three senior staff members who form the Media Directorate of the department of Development and Public Affairs.

Bairds Consultants are currently working on a communication policy and strategy for the University of the North - this will include a media relations policy and crisis communication plan. Until then the current situation remains unchanged.

#### (iv)a Elements of a Media Relations Policy

Given the problems that the university is currently faced with, during the interviews there was a feeling that a Media Relations Policy should be written down, product of campus-wide consultation, centralised (controlled by the Department of Development and Public Affairs) and be enforceable i.e disciplinary measures should be taken against those who would disobey its stipulations or guidelines. Such a policy should have the following elements:

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#### Name of Institution (University of the North) Media Relations Policy

##### 1. Preamble

- What the University does or stand for.
- Kind of relationship it wants to create with media (positive)
- Quick response to queries
- Office responsible for media relations - principal contact between University and Media.

##### 2. Comment on Behalf of Institution

- Office - handle all queries, disseminate information, principal contact.
- Personnel - to issue statements/spokespersons e.g. Vice- Chancellor, Deputy VC, Registrar and Media Relations Director (only).
- Academic Personnel - On their fields of specialisation, but with the prior knowledge and approval of the Media Relations Office.



### **How**

- Quick response to queries ( state time frame).
- Positive , factual, non- confrontational approach to media.
- State what to do with public and confidential information (more especially guidelines on the latter).

### **3.Contact**

1. Media Relations Office Staff - What do to when contacted by media, refer media to relevant Senior Staff Member.
  - Media contact report (design a form for that)
  - Be informed about which reporters are likely to call and how to deal with them.
2. General staff
  - Contact and refer media to media office.

### **4. Media**

- Contact Media Relations Office - for prompt response.
- Where possible inform Media office in advance before coming, not unless invited.
- Be accompanied by Media Relations Office staff - when on campus.

### **5. Soliciting Media Attention**

- State who is responsible for compiling media releases, authorises and has final say.
- What kind of information can or should be publicised.
- Guidelines on what various departments should do when they need contact with media ; liaise with media office ; time frames/due dates be specified -for purpose of co -ordination.

### **6. Enforcement/Disciplinary procedures**

- State what will happen to those who disobey the stipulations of policy.
- Departmental Heads be made responsible to liaise with Media Office and enforce the policy.

### **7. Crisis Communication Management Plan / Emergencies (could be separate or part of policy)**

- What should happen in cases of emergency
- When to move from media relations policy to crisis communication plan.

## 8. Additional Information (guidelines more especially for those who deal with the media)

- Include issues not covered above.
- Some Dos & Don'ts e.g. 1. Dos
  - Be truthful and accurate
  - Keep it simple
  - Know the reporter, his/her company etc.
  - What to do in case of factual errors.
- 2. Don'ts - Argue with reporters
  - use 'no comment'
  - Ask to review reporters copy before publication.
  - Infringe reporters right to freedom of expression.

End

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In a policy like this it is not possible to cover all contingencies but attempts should be made to do just that and be consultative enough so as to ensure its legitimacy. While the ideas for these elements of a Media Relations Policy are the Authors and the interviewees' ideas, the following web sites were also visited for more information - their influence is therefore acknowledged: 1. [Http://www.winning-newsmedia.com/policy/htm](http://www.winning-newsmedia.com/policy/htm).

2. [Http://www.mrcentral.com/say-what.shtml](http://www.mrcentral.com/say-what.shtml). -more especially the article "Say what? Write a media relations policy for your firm" by Freedman, D.M. and Purtel, J.E. 2000.

## 5.3 CHALLENGES FACING HBIs and THE UNIVERSITY OF THE NORTH

### 5.3.1 Historically Black Institutions (HBIs)

In the foreword to the Education White Paper 3 ( 24 July 1997: 2) , the Minister of Education, Professor Sibusiso Bengu said that "the transformation of the higher education system to reflect the changes that are taking place in our society and to strengthen the values and practices of our new democracy, is, as i have stated on many previous occasions, not negotiable. The higher education system must be transformed to redress past inequalities, to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs and to respond to new realities and opportunities". The transformation of the higher education system and its institutions required the following, as summarised in the White Paper 3 (1997:5):-

- Increased and broader participation
- Responsiveness to societal interests and needs
- Co- operation and partnerships in governance.



HBI's welcomed these planned changes which were further entrenched in the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997). Transformation posed several challenges for these institutions, some of which were products of different views on what constitutes transformation, counter-transformation elements within these institutions and society wide as well as the conflicting messages that the government was sending on the future of HBI's. The major challenge stems from the fact that HBI's were created more for the provision of a skilled workforce for the Bantustan system than educational development. The inequitable distribution of resources also reflected this issue.

A cursory glance at newspaper articles reveal the following problems at HBI's in particular: Class boycotts/disruptions, financial mismanagement, unpaid student fees, corruption, subsidy cuts and a lack of transformation. The following headlines say it all:

- "Student fees crisis grows as debt doubles to R780m in one year" - IOL,1999.
- "Dropouts owe bulk of unpaid varsity fees" - IOL,1998.
- "Student leaders riding the gravy train" - M&G, 25/09/1998.
- "Universities face major revamp" - Sunday Times, 9/07/2000
- "Five Universities without Rectors" - IOL,1999.
- "Black Universities under threat" - IOL,1999.
- "Cutting the heart out of learning", (subsidy cuts) - M&G, 31/12/1996

The above are just a tip of the iceberg. The threat to HBI's was further illustrated by the release in July 2000 of the Council on Higher Education Size and Shape Task Team report which propagated further changes and amalgamation of certain institutions of higher learning. Several responses to the report highlighted the fact that the report favoured Historically White Institutions (HWIs) as compared to HBI's, which were economically disadvantaged because of the Bantu Education policy of Apartheid (City Press,19/11/200). At the University of the North, the same sentiments were shared generally in consultative meetings which culminated in a response compiled by Professor A.L.Mawasha on behalf of the institution on the 8 September 2000. In this report it was stressed that the University of the North is serving a predominantly rural-based target market which any proposed changes to the institution have to take into consideration. Failure to do that would further accelerate the cycle of poverty, from which most of these students were trying to extricate themselves.

### 5.3.2 The University of the North

On the 28 February 1996, Prof. Njabulo Ndebele remarked during his Vice-Chancellor's Annual Address that "the mission of the University of the North shall be to attain scholarship and professionalism among its staff and students and to improve the quality of life in which it operates through:

- Good governance and effective management
- Financial stability
- Creation of a culture of work, learning, teaching and research



- Appropriate campuses and education policy and infra structural development and physical environment
- A development orientation that is rooted in the community within which it operates”.

However, two years down the line, the Mojapelo Commission was appointed in 1998 to investigate financial mismanagement and other issues. In July 2000 an Independent Assessor, Prof. Thandabantu Nhlapo was also appointed to look into the:

- Source and nature of the ongoing discontent at the University of the North, and
- Steps required to restore proper governance and management, including the promotion of reconciliation at the University of the North.

This followed the suspension of the VC, Dr. Minyuku and other staff members in December 1999. Subsequent to that Prof.N.C.P.Golele (Department of Xisonga) was appointed as the Acting Vice-Chancellor until the palace coup in September 2000 by Prof. Machete who was the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor. Prof.N.C.P.Golele’s term had been characterised by general discontent by both students and staff members.

Prof.Thandabantu Nhlapo identified several sources of discontent at the university - some of which correspond to those stated by the two interview respondents in this study (mentioned in previous chapter). The two respondents had mentioned them as challenges, whose immediate solution would contribute tremendously to a good image of the university. These issues were covered extensively by the media, including the Mail and Guardian and IOL. The Independent Assessor’s report, (2000: 12 -13) identified some of the problems as : total lack of leadership, policy, vision and direction; a succession of weak and inefficient management teams; a weak Council and marginalised, ineffective, inappropriately constituted Senate; financial mismanagement and a deepening financial crisis; unchecked and unpunished corruption and fraud; disproportionate power in the hands of “structures”; failure to implement reports of previous Commissions of Inquiry; wide- ranging suspensions of staff; and a poor work ethic among staff.

A full list is available in the report. Some of the issues had cropped up during the Mojapelo Commission in 1998 but a willingness to implement recommendations is seemingly non-existent among the top management at the University of the North. All these factors had a contributing factor to the deteriorating image of the university.

#### **5.4 EXCELLENT PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE**

Conflict within a changing environment like the one the University of the North is operating in, is inevitable. There is bound to be conflict of interest between forces who are for and those against change or transformation. It all depends on how this conflict is managed.

Similarly, within media and public relations practice, conflict between media relations practitioners and journalists abounds. This is a result of the manipulative nature of the



relationship between the two. Practitioners place more emphasis on the use of the media to reach their target publics. As a result they will do everything in their power to control the media because that is where, they believe, their relationship with the publics begins and ends. Journalists on the other hand believe in publishing newsworthy stories. Hence the endless conflict. This according to Grunig (1990) is both unnecessary and non strategic. Only one side is likely to benefit and the other loses. Strategic public relations relies less on the media. The aim is to be as independent as much as possible from the publics.

To reach their goals organisations have to plan and manage their independence from the publics strategically. It is incumbent upon organisations to identify the publics that are instrumental in the achievement of their goals and to design communication programmes that build relationships with these publics. Research is an important component of this process. It is used not only to identify the publics relevant to the organisation's survival but also to choose specialised media or channels to communicate with strategic publics. Therefore the mass media is not a viable option for communication.

Two forms of communication underlie the practice of public relations. They are Asymmetrical and Symmetrical communication.

External and internal communication programmes based on symmetrical public relations characterise excellent Public Relations Departments. It is also good in managing conflict and leads to more interaction and co- operation.

Based on the two world views discussed above, four models of Public Relations Practice developed. A detailed discussion of the models was done in Chapter 3 - only a brief overview will be attempted here. The first one press agency strives for favourable publicity especially in mass media usually through propaganda. The public information model uses journalists in residence to distribute relatively objective information through the mass media and controlled media e.g. newsletters and brochures. Press agency and the public information model are both one way asymmetrical models, not based on research and strategic planning.

The third model, two-way asymmetric uses research to develop messages that will persuade strategic publics. It is less effective, manipulative and produces conflict with journalists when sources only release 'persuasive' information and journalists want to report other information. The last one, two-way symmetrical is based on research, uses communication to manage conflict and improves understanding with strategic publics. It is used by excellent public relations departments and produces reporting that is less discrepant with views of the organisation.

Organisations usually use one or more of these models for certain purposes. The University of the North moved between the public information and two-way asymmetrical models - depending on whichever best suited its purposes at a particular period. Hence the conflict with not only its internal but also its external publics, including the media.

On the contrary, excellent public relations practice has among other things, a participative culture; it is located in the organisational structure and has potential for excellence so that the Head is included in the dominant coalition (management). Failure results in dominant coalition with little understanding of the dynamics of public relations to take over. This results in conflict and manipulation - several events as mentioned before have proved this point at the University of the North, where people with less understanding of the negative impact of their actions seem to define the strategic direction of the institution. Grunig (1990:24) says that "Dominant coalitions without a Public Relations Executive from an excellent department generally chose a nonstrategic, asymmetrical model of public relations that maximizes potential for such conflict".

## 5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

Some of the problems that were identified during this study have been dealt with thoroughly elsewhere - Mojapelo Commission and The Report of the Independent Assessor. Less emphasis will be placed on them in this section.

Based on the aims and the findings of the study the following recommendations are made for the Department of Development and Public Affairs in particular.

- The University needs as a matter of urgency to appoint a Media Relations Officer/Director who would be able to sit in executive Meetings - so as to have a firm grasp of discussions and decision making. The person would be able to advise University management on the implications of the decisions on the image of the institutions. He would be the main contact between the university and the media and would be in charge of all media liaison activities.
- The Department has to facilitate the development of a Media Relations Policy. This policy should be a product of wide consultations on Campus and be enforceable. Contents of such a policy have already been dealt with in the previous sections. This would make the job of the Media Relations Officer much easier.
- A pro-active approach to media relations based on a two-way symmetrical world view should be encouraged. This will help to resolve conflict between media relations practitioners and the media and will benefit both the university and its strategic publics.



## 5.6 FURTHER RESEARCH

- This research was limited to only two newspapers and for a short period. It might be necessary to investigate representation of the university in several media e.g. radio, TV and other print media over a longer period - starting before 1994.
- Internal communication at the University has received scant attention - the role of such and its effectiveness needs serious attention.
- While Radio Turf seems to be making inroads into the local population (around Mankweng) a more detailed research needs to be done on how the University and the Department of Development and Public Affairs can enhance its community relations and initiate a development communication programme.

## 5.7 SUMMARY

Media relations is a process through which an organisation uses the media to communicate with its strategic publics. The context in which this communication takes place helps to define the nature of the relationship between the organisation and the media on one hand and its publics on the other hand. The situation in tertiary institutions especially HBIs is riddled with conflict - which makes the relationship between them and the media much more challenging. Hence the need to manage this relationship.

The conflict at the University of the North (UNIN) is political and its roots are firmly located within the Apartheid ideology which created colleges for various racial and ethnic groups - less emphasis was placed on educational development. The current wave of transformation that is facing tertiary institutions has posed more of a challenge than a solution. Given the nature of the media to concentrate on conflict as a news value, the kind of news that emanate from the University of the North reflects this conflict. What emerges is a negative picture of a university so riddled with conflict that academic progress takes second place. This has affected the corporate image of the whole institution, including its products. Coupled with the absence of a media relations officer and policy and the reactive approach to media relations that characterises the Department of Development and Public Affairs, this calls for serious concern indeed.

From a media relations perspective, a solution seems to lie in the appointment of a Media Relations Officer/Director who would have access to executive decision-making and offer much needed advice before those decisions make news headlines. An approach to media relations that reflect a two-way symmetrical world view is envisaged - where communication guided by research would be used to resolve conflict and reach strategic publics, to the benefit of everyone.

Despite the problems that are currently experienced at the University of the North, White (1997:229) is optimistic that the university will win, ultimately. He said that:

An appreciation of Turfloop on the edge of chaos offers a rare opportunity to see hope, even possible unity, towards a common destiny. As Turfloop stands there, it has to decide whether it will allow itself to be pushed into collapse or whether it will rise to new heights of complexity in the service of the community...We need to appreciate the necessity of chaos, understanding it as the life source of our creative power. The image of the edge of chaos, with its vision of the unknown, is particularly powerful.

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## Appendix 1

### INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONS

With Staff members of the Department of Development and Public Affairs

INTERVIEWEE:

INTERVIEWER:

DATE:

### DUTIES

1. What does your job entail?
2. Who is responsible for media relations in this department?
3. What is the role played by Bairds Consultants at the University ?

### IMAGE

4. How do you think the University of the North has been portrayed in the press during the period 1994 -1999? How can that image be improved?
5. In you opinion which newspapers have been covering the University the most? How can you describe your relationship with most of them? Were they co - operative?
6. What are the challenges facing the University of the North and how do you think your department can help to meet those challenges?

### POLICY

7. Does the University of the North have a Media Relations Policy ? If no what steps are being taken to develop one ? What do you think the policy should contain? How does the presence or absence of such a policy assist/hamper you job performance?

Thank you for your participation in this interview.

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